



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

*Summer 2014*

# Congressional Information Packet



## Your Guide to VA Benefits and Services

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At the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), we proudly serve and honor America's Veterans, and we are working to ensure that they receive quality medical care, benefits, and memorial services. In the attached document you will find information on VA programs, as well as tools that may be helpful for your office as you provide services to your Veteran constituents and their families.

VA employees are committed to earning the trust of our nation's Veterans. And our Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA) remains committed to assist you, our Congressional partners, by providing accurate and timely responses to Congressional requests for information, educational briefings, hearings, and case work.

If you need additional information, please contact us at [OCLA-CLS@va.gov](mailto:OCLA-CLS@va.gov) or 202-461-6490.

# VA ACCESS AUDIT

*“Our top priority is to get our Veterans off wait lists and into clinics. We need to continue to examine the best practices of healthcare systems across the country to find immediate solutions for timely delivery of quality healthcare. VA must be at the forefront of access and innovation. Our Veterans deserve nothing less.”*

Acting Secretary Sloan D. Gibson

In mid-April 2014, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs directed the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to complete a nationwide Access Audit to ensure a full understanding of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ (VA) policy among scheduling staff, identify any inappropriate scheduling practices used by employees regarding Veteran preferences for appointment dates, and review waiting list management. On May 30, 2014 VA provided an interim Audit report to Congress and the public. And on June 9, 2014 the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released the results from its Nationwide Access Audit, along with facility level patient access data, medical center quality and efficiency data, and mental health provider survey data.

Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Sloan Gibson continues to reemphasize his commitment to earn the trust of Veterans who VA is privileged to serve. Under the Accelerated Access to Care Initiative VA has contacted over 100,000 Veterans across the country to get them off of wait lists and into clinics.

VA officials will continue to meet with industry leaders including Kaiser Permanente, Gartner and Mayo Clinic to discuss state-of-the-art health care access. Discussions are focusing on improving Veteran access to quality healthcare and innovating measurement approaches to gauge short- and long-term access to care. Topics also include recommended strategies and tools to help managers and providers best serve Veterans and provide a consistent patient experience.

Since becoming Acting Secretary, Gibson has held meetings with Veterans Service Organizations focused on timeliness of Veterans health care. In addition to meeting with the Executive Directors of the American Legion, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Vietnam Veterans of America, Gibson has also met with senior leadership from 27 Veterans Service Organizations and Military Service Organizations. Acting Secretary Gibson continues to conduct meetings with local VSOs in locations such as Phoenix, San Antonio, Fayetteville, and Baltimore as part of his nationwide outreach. VA has also instructed all VA Medical Center Directors to meet with local VSOs once a month.

Acting Secretary Gibson has announced a series of additional actions in response to VA's audit findings and data, including:

- **Establishing New Patient Satisfaction Measurement Program**

Acting Secretary Gibson has directed VHA to immediately begin developing a new patient satisfaction measurement program to provide real-time, robust, location-by-location information on patient satisfaction, to include satisfaction data of those Veterans attempting to access VA healthcare for the first time. This program will be developed with input from Veterans Service Organizations, outside health care organizations, and other entities. This will ensure VA collects an additional set of data – directly from the Veteran's perspective – to understand how VA is doing throughout the system.

- **Holding Senior Leaders Accountable**

Where audited sites identify concerns within the parent facility or its affiliated clinics, VA will trigger administrative procedures to ascertain the appropriate follow-on personnel actions for specific individuals.

- **Ordering an Immediate VHA Central Office and VISN Office Hiring Freeze**

Acting Secretary Gibson has ordered an immediate hiring freeze at the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) central office in Washington D.C. and the 21 VHA Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) regional offices, except for critical positions to be approved by the Secretary on a case-by-case basis. This action will begin to remove bureaucratic obstacles and establish responsive, forward leaning leadership.

- **Removing 14-Day Scheduling Goal**

VA is eliminating the 14-day scheduling goal from employee performance contracts. This action will eliminate incentives to engage in inappropriate scheduling practices or behaviors.

- **Increasing Transparency by Posting Data Twice-Monthly**

At the direction of the Acting Secretary, VHA will post regular updates to the access data released on June 9 at VA.gov. Twice-monthly data updates will enhance transparency and provide the most immediate information to Veterans and the public on Veterans access to quality healthcare. *(Data has been updated as of June 19, 2014)*

- **Initiating an Independent, External Audit of Scheduling Practices**

Acting Secretary Gibson has also directed that an independent, external audit of system-wide VHA scheduling practices be performed.

- **Sent Additional Frontline Team to Address Phoenix**

Following his trip to Phoenix VA Medical Center in early June, Acting Secretary Gibson directed a VHA frontline team to travel to Phoenix to immediately address scheduling, access, and resource requirements needed to provide Veterans the timely, quality healthcare they

- **Utilizing High Performing Facilities to Help Those That Need Improvement**

VA will formalize a process in which high performing facilities provide direct assistance and share best practices with facilities that require improvement on particular medical center quality and efficiency, also known as SAIL, performance measures.

- **Applying Immediate Access Reforms to Most Challenged VA Facilities**

Acting Secretary Gibson is working to implement a series of measures to address healthcare access problems in Phoenix. He is also working to apply the same reforms to facilities identified by the audit results as having the most access problems. These reforms include:

- **Hiring Additional Clinical and Patient Support Staff**

VA will deploy teams of dedicated human resource employees to accelerate the hiring of additional, needed staff.

- **Employing New Staffing Measures**

VA's first goal is to get Veterans off wait lists and into clinics. VA is using temporary staffing measures, along with clinical and administrative support, to ensure these Veterans receive the care they have earned through their service.

- **Deploying Mobile Medical Units**

VA will send mobile medical units to facilities to immediately provide services to patients and Veterans awaiting care.

- **Providing More Care by Modifying Local Contract Operations**

VA will modify local contract operations to be able to offer more community-based care to Veterans waiting to be seen by a doctor.

- **Removing Senior Leadership Where Appropriate**

Where appropriate, VA will initiate the process of removing senior leaders. Acting Secretary Gibson is committed to using all authority at VA's disposal to enforce accountability among senior leaders.

- **Suspending Performance Awards**

VA has suspended all VHA senior executive performance awards for FY2014.

- **Future Travel**

Acting Secretary Gibson will continue to travel to a series of VA facilities across the country. He will hear directly from Veterans and employees about obstacles to providing timely, quality care and how VA can immediately address them.

National audit and patient access data available at [www.va.gov/health/accessaudit.asp](http://www.va.gov/health/accessaudit.asp).

Medical center quality and efficiency (SAIL) and mental health data available at <http://www.hospitalcompare.va.gov>.



# RECENT VA NEWS

All VA News Releases can be found online: [www.va.gov/opa/pressrel](http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel)

<a href="#">Statement from Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Sloan D. Gibson Regarding Nomination of Mr. Robert A. McDonald to be Next Secretary of Veterans Affairs</a>	June 30, 2014
<a href="#">VA Announces \$5 Million in Grants to Aid Homeless Veterans With Special Needs</a>	June 26, 2014
<a href="#">Acting Secretary Gibson Statement on Whistleblower Protections</a>	June 23, 2014
<a href="#">VA Celebrates 70th Anniversary of the Original “GI Bill”</a>	June 23, 2014
<a href="#">Acting Secretary Gibson Initiates Monthly Site Inspections Across Veterans Health Facilities to Restore Integrity to Scheduling Process</a>	June 18, 2014
<a href="#">Acting Secretary Gibson Initiates Process to Select New Veterans Health Chief</a>	June 17, 2014
<a href="#">VA Meets With Healthcare Industry to Discuss Best Scheduling Practices</a>	June 10, 2014
<a href="#">VA Releases Data on Quality, Access to Veterans Healthcare</a>	June 9, 2014
<a href="#">Message from the Acting Secretary of Veterans Affairs Sloan D. Gibson</a>	June 2, 2014
<a href="#">Secretary Shinseki’s Farewell Message to VA Employees</a>	May 30, 2014
<a href="#">VA Makes Land Purchase for New National Cemetery in Western New York</a>	May 30, 2014
<a href="#">Statement by Secretary Shinseki on Allegations Regarding the Phoenix VA Health Care System</a>	May 1, 2014
<a href="#">Patient Aligned Care Teams Improve Access and Veteran Satisfaction</a>	April 30, 2014
<a href="#">SGLI Premium Adjustment Effective July 1, 2014</a>	April 25, 2014
<a href="#">Independent 2013 Survey Shows Veterans Highly Satisfied with VA Care</a>	April 16, 2014
<a href="#">VA Researchers Receive Nation’s Top Award for Early Career Scientists</a>	April 15, 2014
<a href="#">VA Hosts Senior International Forum and Ministerial Summit on Veterans Affairs</a>	April 8, 2014
<a href="#">VA Hosts Forum on Veterans’ Legal Needs</a>	April 4, 2014
<a href="#">Disability Claims Backlog Reduced by 44 Percent Since Peaking One Year Ago</a>	April 1, 2014
<a href="#">VA Removes Annual Income Reporting Requirement</a>	March 24, 2014
<a href="#">VA Makes Specially Adaptive Housing Grant Eligibility Automatic for Veterans and Servicemembers Living with ALS</a>	March 19, 2014



# HELPFUL VA TERMS AND STATS

The following are some common VA terms that who hope will be helpful to you in your interactions with your constituents and VA.

**Veterans Health Administration (VHA)** - One of three administrations within VA, the Veterans Health Administration is home to the United States' largest integrated health care system consisting of medical centers, community-based outpatient clinics, community living centers, Vet Centers and Domiciliaries.

**Healthcare System (HCS)** - In many areas of the country, several medical centers and clinics may work together to offer services to area Veterans as a HCS in an effort to provide more efficient care. By sharing services between medical centers, Healthcare Systems allow VHA to provide Veterans easier access to advanced medical care closer to their homes.

**Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC)** - VHA utilizes CBOCs across the country. These clinics provide the most common outpatient services, including health and wellness visits, without the hassle of visiting a larger medical center. VHA continues to expand the network of CBOCs to include more rural locations, working to put access to care closer to home.

**Community Living Centers (CLC)** - These skilled nursing facilities, often referred to as nursing homes, care for Veterans with chronic stable conditions such as dementia, those requiring rehabilitation, or those who need comfort and care at the end of life.

**Domiciliary** - These facilities provide a variety of care to Veterans who suffer from a wide range of medical, psychiatric, vocational, educational, or social problems and illnesses in a safe, secure homelike environment.

**Vet Center** - Vet Centers provide readjustment counseling and outreach services to all Veterans who served in any combat zone. Services are also available for family members dealing with military related issues. VHA operates Vet Centers in all fifty states, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands.

**Veterans Integrated Services Network (VISN)** - The U.S. is divided into 21 VISNs — regional systems of care working together to better meet local health care needs and provides greater access to care.

**Patient Advocates** - Available at every medical center, Patient Advocates are highly trained professionals who can help resolve a patient's concerns about any aspect of their health care experience, particularly those concerns that cannot be resolved at the point of care. Patient Advocates listen to any questions, problems, or special needs our Veterans have and refer their concerns to the appropriate Medical Center staff for resolution.

**Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)** - One of three administrations within VA, the VBA provides benefits and services to Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families in recognition of their service to the Nation. Within VBA, there are three Deputy Under Secretaries led by the Under Secretary for Benefits. Their organizations provide oversight for Disability Assistance, Economic Opportunity, and Field Operations.

**Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS)** - Standardizes disability compensation claims processing through a web-based paperless system.

**Regional Offices (RO)** - There are 56 ROs within the United States. There is also an RO in Puerto Rico and the Philippines.

*Helpful VA Terms and Stats (cont.):*

**Disability Compensation Claim** - A tax-free monetary benefit paid to Veterans with disabilities that are the result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service. The benefit amount is graduated according to the degree of the Veteran's disability on a scale from 10 percent to 100 percent (in increments of 10 percent). Compensation may also be paid for disabilities that are considered related or secondary to disabilities occurring in service and for disabilities presumed to be related to circumstances of military service, even though they may arise after service. Generally, the degrees of disability specified are also designed to compensate for considerable loss of working time from exacerbations or illnesses. There are many types of claims for disability compensation. For example, if you're filing a VA claim for the very first time, you have an original claim. A reopened claim means you have new and material evidence and you want VA to reconsider a claim it once denied. There are also new claims, secondary claims, and special claims.

**Fully Developed Claims (FDC)** - An option available to Veterans and survivors to allow for faster decisions from VA on compensation, pension, and survivor benefit claims. Veterans and survivors simply submit all relevant records in their possession, and those records which are easily obtainable, such as private medical records, at the time they make their claim and certify that they have no further evidence to submit. VA can then review and process the claim more quickly.

***VBA business lines:***

**Compensation Service** - Oversees the delivery of disability compensation to Veterans disabled by an injury or disease incurred or aggravated during active military service.

**Pension and Fiduciary Service** - Provides program oversight that helps wartime Veterans, their families, and survivors with financial challenges by providing supplemental income through Veterans Pension, Death Pension, and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.

**Insurance Service** - Maintains life insurance programs that give financial security and peace of mind for Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families.

**Benefits Assistance Service** - Facilitates Client Services and Outreach, Web Communications, and ensures Quality and Training for VBA employees who engage Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families through services such as the National Call Center.

**Education Service** - Administers VA's education programs that provide education and training benefits to eligible Servicemembers, Veterans, and dependents.

**Loan Guaranty Service** - Provides oversight of the VA Guaranteed Home Loan Program that guarantees home loans in varying amounts. Ensures Veteran's rights are protected when purchasing a home under this program.

**Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) Service** - Oversees programs that provide employment and independent living services including vocational counseling, job search assistance, and post-secondary training.

**Monday Morning Workload Report** - One of VBA's transparency tools that provides real-time status updates regarding the claims and backlog inventory so you can track our performance in serving those who've served our nation. These weekly reports from our 56 regional offices let you see our progress in processing Compensation, Pension, and Education benefits. You can also download a spreadsheet to see the most recent week's worth of performance data.

*Helpful VA Terms and Stats (cont.):*

**The Board of Veterans' Appeals (also known as "BVA" or "the Board")** - Part of the VA, located in Washington, D.C. Members of the Board review benefit claims determinations made by local VA offices and issue decision on appeals. These Law Judges and attorneys experienced in veterans law and in reviewing benefit claims, are the only ones who can issue Board decisions. Staff attorneys, also trained in Veterans law, review the facts of each appeal and assist the Board members. {38 U.S.C. §§ 7103, 7104}

**United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims** - A national court of record, established under Article I of the Constitution of the United States. The Court has exclusive jurisdiction to provide judicial review of final decisions by the Board of Veterans' Appeals, an entity within the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Court provides veterans an impartial judicial forum for review of administrative decisions by the Board of Veterans' Appeals that are adverse to the Veteran-appellant's claim of entitlement to benefits for service-connected disabilities, survivor benefits and other benefits such as education payments and waiver of indebtedness. In furtherance of its mission, the Court also seeks to help ensure that all Veterans have equal access to the Court and to promote public trust and confidence in the Court. The Court's principal office is in Washington, D.C., but the Court is authorized to sit anywhere in the United States and does so a limited number of times each year. A Veterans must have a final decision from the Board of Veterans' Appeals - not the Regional Office - before they can appeal to this Court.

**National Cemetery Administration (NCA)** - One of three administrations within VA, NCA honors Veterans and their families with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate their service and sacrifice to our Nation.

**National Cemeteries** - Cemeteries operated and maintained by NCA devoted to the memorialization of those who served this nation. Please note that there is not a VA national cemetery in every state. Two national Cemeteries – Arlington and Soldiers Home – are administered by the Army. Fourteen national cemeteries are maintained by the Department of the Interior.

**State Veterans Cemeteries** - Many states have established state veterans cemeteries. Eligibility is similar to VA national cemeteries, but may include residency requirements. Even though they may have been established or improved with Government funds through VA's Veterans Cemetery Grants Program, state veterans cemeteries are run solely by the states. We cannot answer your questions or comments about any of these veterans cemeteries. Please contact the specific cemetery for information.

**Burial Benefits** - Benefit available to eligible Veterans that includes a gravesite in any of our national cemeteries with available space, opening and closing of the grave, perpetual care, a government headstone or marker, a burial flag, and a Presidential Memorial Certificate, at no cost to the family. Some Veterans may also be eligible for Burial Allowances. Cremated remains are buried or inurned in national cemeteries in the same manner and with the same honors as casketed remains.

**Veteran Service Organizations (VSO)** - Private non-profit groups that advocate on behalf of Veterans. Some VSOs are "chartered", which means they are federally chartered and/or recognized or approved by the VA Secretary for purposes of preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claims under laws administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs

**VA Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs (OCLA)** - The focal point for Department management and coordination of all matters involving the Congress. Assistance to Members of Congress and their staff is available through offices located at the Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office and on Capitol Hill.

*Helpful VA Terms and Stats (cont.):*

## HELPFUL VA STATISTICS

- 340, 000 VA Employees
- 32% VA Employees - Veterans
- 8,920,000 Veterans Enrolled in VA Health Care System
- 3,840,000 Veterans Receiving VA Disability Compensation
- 21,973,000 Projected U.S. Veterans Population
- 2,271,000 Projected U.S. Female Veteran Population

## EACH DAY AT VA

*(Based on FY2013 Department-wide Statistics)*

- **236,000** Healthcare Outpatient Appointments
- **1,100** Medical Surgeries
- **49,215** Mental Health Outpatient Appointments
- **786** Veterans Crisis Line Calls
  
- **\$389,000,000** Provided in VA Guaranteed Housing Loans
- **\$33,100,000** Provided in Education Programs
- **\$2,600,000** Provided in Vocational Rehabilitation Programs
- **\$163,500,000** Provided in Disability Compensation
- **\$14,200,000** Provided in Pensions for Low Income Beneficiaries
  
- **475** Interments in National Cemeteries
- **3,300,000** Gravesites Maintained as National Shrines



# VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION

## IMPROVING DELIVERY OF BENEFITS TO VETERANS, SERVICEMEMBERS, AND THEIR FAMILIES

VA's Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is currently undergoing the largest transformation in its history to eliminate the backlog of disability compensation claims, and transform the way benefits and services are delivered to Veterans, their families, and Survivors. At this time, too many Veterans wait too long to receive benefits they have earned and deserve. This has never been acceptable to VA or to the dedicated employees of VBA—52% of whom are Veterans themselves. VA greatly appreciates the investments in claims processing improvements provided by the President and Congress over the past 5 years.

VA continues to improve our transparency while we aggressively implementing our plan to eliminate the backlog - a set of actions, created after thorough stakeholder engagement, targeted at reorganizing and retraining our people, streamlining our processes, and deploying technology designed to achieve VA's goal of processing all claims within 125 days with 98 percent accuracy in 2015.

### **VBA Transformation Results: As of May 31, 2014**

- ⇒ VBA is reducing the pending disability claims *inventory*.  
Peak: 884,000 claims in July 2012  
Now: 566,000 claims  
**Improvement: 36%**
- ⇒ The number of claims pending over 125 days and considered part of the *claims backlog* has decreased.  
Peak: 611,000 claims in March 2013  
Now: 283,000 claims  
**Improvement: 54%**
- ⇒ Veterans are waiting less time for decisions and benefits.  
Peak: 282 days in February 2013  
Now: 158 days  
**Improvement: 124 days**
- ⇒ VBA has completed 864,000 claims this fiscal year.  
169,000 more claims than completed at this time last year  
**Improvement: 24% -- with 5% increase in claims received since last year**
- ⇒ VBA completed 114,000 claims in May 2014.  
5,000 more claims than completed in May 2013.  
**Improvement: 5%**
- ⇒ *3-month issue-based* accuracy for rating decisions was 95% at the beginning of FY 2013.  
Now: 96%  
**Improvement: 1 percentage point**
- ⇒ *12-month issue-based* accuracy for rating decision was 96% when this metric was first available at the end of FY 2013  
Now: 96%
- ⇒ *3-month claims-based* accuracy for rating decisions was 83% in 2011.  
Now: 90%  
**Improvement: 7 percentage points**
- ⇒ *12-month claims-based* accuracy for rating decision was 84% in 2011.  
Now: 90%  
**Improvement: 6 percentage point**

## WORKLOAD AND PERFORMANCE REPORTS—A PROVEN HISTORY OF TRANSPARENCY

VA encourages our Congressional partners to follow our progress and view the current inventory of claims, backlog, and other workload measures for both the national level and at the regional office level by visiting <http://www.vba.va.gov/reports/>.

- The Monday Morning Reports (MMWR) provide workload indicators reported by VBA regional offices and updated weekly. The home page for MMWR contains current and historical information as well as definitions for data provided in the reports.
- The ASPIRE Dashboard provides monthly information on how VBA and regional offices are doing in relation to 2015 aspirational goals. To find data for your regional office in ASPIRE:
  - ⇒ Find your state on the map, place your cursor within the state, and click.
  - ⇒ This will open the Veterans Benefits Administration ASPIRE Benefits site; click “enter.”
  - ⇒ You will see a split table; on the left table click on “compensation.”
  - ⇒ This will expand the table.
  - ⇒ Follow the table to the right until you locate the column of your regional office.

### Information as of May 31, 2014:

**Pension inventory:** VA is reducing the inventory of pending pension rating claims.

Peak: 36,000 in May 2013

Now: 10,700

**Improvement: 70%**

**Pension backlog:** The number of Veterans’ pension claims pending over 125 days and considered backlog has decreased.

Peak: 14,500 in June 2013

Now: 443

**Improvement: 97%**

**DIC backlog:** The number of Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) claims pending over 125 days and considered backlog has decreased.

Peak: 8,700 in January 2013

Now: 1,100

**Improvement: 87%**

**Fiduciary appointments:** Veterans and survivors unable to manage their financial affairs are waiting less time for a fiduciary to be appointed.

FY 2013: 83 days

Now: 51 days

**Improvement: 32 days**

**IDES Inventory:** VA has reduced Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) final rating inventory:

Peak: 9,058 claims in April 2013

Now: 2,195 claims

**Improvement: 76%**

*VBA Information as of May 31, 2014 (cont.):*

VBA reached its IDES timeliness standard, an average of 30 days pending, in March 2014, and continues to meet this standard with an average of 25 days pending in May 2014.

**Pre-Discharge Results:** VA is planning to combine the Benefits Delivery at Discharge (BDD) and Quick Start programs into one pre-discharge program with expedited claims processing through a paperless process.

**BDD Inventory:**

Peak: 28,993 claims in Feb. 2013

Now: 8,526 claims

***Improvement: 71%***

**BDD Backlog:**

Peak: 14,200 claims in March 2013

Now: 4,123 claims

***Improvement: 71%***

**BDD Days Pending:**

Peak: 193 days in May 2013

Now: 138 days

***Improvement: 55 days***

**Quick Start Inventory:**

Peak: 30,206 claims in Feb. 2012

Now: 6,205 claims

***Improvement: 80%***

**Quick Start Backlog:**

Peak: 21,322 claims in February 2012

Now: 1,573 claims

***Improvement: 93%***

**Quick Start Days Pending:**

Peak: 236 days in May 2012

Now: 91 days

***Improvement: 145 days***

**VA Transformation to Electronic Claims Process**

Instead of filling out and mailing paper forms to VA, Veterans can now use *eBenefits* to submit disability claims. A step-by-step online application—with pre-populated data fields similar to popular tax-preparation software—allows Veterans to upload digital images of records and evidence to support their claims.

Nearly 90 percent of our disability claims inventory is now being processed electronically, which is an increase from 32 percent in June 2013. Approximately 64,000 paper claims remain in the inventory.

*VBA Information as of May 31, 2014 (cont.):*

### **Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS)**

In June 2013, six months ahead of schedule, all of VA's 56 regional offices had implemented the new paperless claims processing system, the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS). In 2014, VA is focusing on expanding automated functionalities, incorporating VBMS-user feedback. VA completed the one-millionth rating decision in VBMS in January 2014, and has now completed over 1.4 million rating decisions in VBMS.

VBMS *Awards* was deployed April 24, 2014, to all 56 regional offices. The release included automated letters for original claims, which pilot sites estimate will reduce processing time for each of these claims. VBA is planning a release later this fiscal year to include automated letters for supplemental claims.

### **Automated Processing of Dependency Claims**

VA built a rules-based processing system (RBPS) to automate processing and payment of dependency claims for Veterans who file online. Over 50 percent of dependency claims that are filed online are now being completed without human intervention. The remaining 50 percent are immediately triaged to make it easier for the claims processor to target the needed evidence for resolution. This new IT capability will enable future claims filed online to be completed quickly and accurately, and our Veterans will receive their payments much faster.

### **Automation of Certain Burial Benefits**

VA has published regulations to enable VA to automatically pay certain surviving spouses the basic burial allowance (\$300 or \$2,000) without requiring them to apply for the benefit. VA estimates this will assist approximately 62,000 surviving spouses.

### **Prioritization of Claims**

VA continues to prioritize specific categories of claims, including: 1) claims of seriously wounded, ill, and injured Servicemembers separating through the Integrated Disability Evaluation System (IDES) 2) Medal of Honor recipients 3) former Prisoners of War 4) the homeless, 5) terminally ill 6) those experiencing extreme financial hardship and 7) and FDCs.

### **Fully Developed Claims**

The fastest way for Veterans to receive a claims decision is to file a "fully developed claim (FDC)." To file an FDC, a Veteran or his/her designated representative should submit to VA all available supporting evidence, like private medical treatment records; identify any relevant records held by federal agencies; and certify he or she has no more evidence to submit. This is the information VA needs to make a determination on a disability claim. Approximately 40% of rating claims received are FDCs. On average, FDCs have been completed in 147 days this fiscal year. For more information, please visit: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/fdc/>.

*VBA Information as of May 31, 2014 (cont.):*

**Mandatory Overtime**

Staff at all regional offices worked mandatory overtime for six months in 2013 and resumed mandatory overtime on January 19, 2014 to accelerate the reduction in the backlog. Employees processing disability compensation claims are working 20 hours of mandatory overtime per month and will continue to through the end of this fiscal year.

**Additional Training**

VA's FY 2014 appropriation included an additional \$10 million to train claims processors. VA is utilizing this funding to conduct a Specialized Adjudication Review Course (SPARC) to retrain approximately 1,250 Veterans Service Representatives and 900 Rating Veterans Service Representatives. SPARC will provide refresher training for employees who are experiencing difficulties in meeting performance standards to ensure their ability to provide quality services to Veterans. VA is also using this funding to provide Supervisory Technical Analysis of Data (STAND) training for 750 coaches and assistant coaches. Training focuses on data analysis and personnel management tools. SPARC and STAND training sessions are being conducted from May through July 2014. Although VBA may experience a short-term decrease in claims production during training, these important investments will lead to long-term improvements in production and decision accuracy.

**Demand/Production**

- VA completed more than 1 million claims each year for the last four years
  - Highest production totals in VA history – completed at 96.7% issue-based accuracy
  - 1st quarter FY 2014 accuracy rates, reported in March 2014, show claim-based rating accuracy of 91.0% and issue-based rating accuracy rate of 96.5%.
- VA received over 4.5 million claims over that same time period
  - Claimed medical disabilities (issues) processed: 2009—2.7 million; 2013—5.6 million
  - 107% increase – each issue must be researched, adjudicated, and rated

**Breakout of inventory and backlog by era (as of September 30, 2013)**

- Vietnam-era Veterans: 36% of the total inventory; 37% of the backlog
- Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts: 22% of the total inventory; 22% of the backlog
- Gulf War-era Veterans: 23% of the total inventory; 22% backlog
- Korean War and World War II: 7% of total inventory, 7% of backlog
- Peacetime: 11% of inventory & backlog

*VBA Information as of May 31, 2014 (cont.):*

**Claims in the inventory by type (as of September 30, 2013)**

- Original - Veterans claiming disability compensation the first time
- Supplemental - Veterans seeking to increase existing benefits/filing for new disability(ies)
- Current Inventory: 66% supplemental; 34% original
- Supplemental Claims
  - 77% of Veterans filing supplemental claims already receive VA benefits
    - 10% receive benefits at 100% level; receive \$2,800, or more, per month
    - 27% receive benefits at 70% level or higher; receive \$1,300 or more per month
  - 40% of supplemental claims are from Vietnam-era Veterans – the largest cohort
  - 18% of supplemental claims are from Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans
- 51% of Veterans in the inventory are already receiving monetary compensation from VA

**Compensation and DIC Benefits Paid by VA**

- Fiscal year 2013 – \$59.5 billion in benefits to 4.0 million Veterans and survivors
- Fiscal year 2012 – \$53.8 billion in benefits to 3.8 million Veterans and survivors



# VBA - REACHING MORE VETERANS

VA remains dedicated to providing our nation's Veterans all of the benefits they have earned. In pursuance of our mission to best serve Veterans, we have focused on increasing outreach regarding all benefits available. In FY 2013, VA team members engaged with over 700,000 Veterans at outreach events across the country, which is a 16% increase from FY 2012. In addition to disability compensation for Veterans, VA provides Veterans and their families numerous other benefits, including:

- **Pension:** <http://www.benefits.va.gov/pension/>
  - In FY 2013, over \$5.1 billion in pension benefits went to 308,000 Veterans and 210,000 Survivors.
  - 42% of Veterans pension beneficiaries and 75% of Survivors pension beneficiaries are over age 75.
- **Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC):** [http://benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/types-dependency\\_and\\_indemnity.asp](http://benefits.va.gov/COMPENSATION/types-dependency_and_indemnity.asp)
  - In FY 2013, VA paid over \$5.7 billion in DIC benefits to 377,000 Survivors.
  - 89% of DIC beneficiaries are age 55 or older.
- **Fiduciary Services:** <http://www.benefits.va.gov/FIDUCIARY/>
  - In FY 2013, VA protected more than 147,000 beneficiaries, who due to injury, disease, or age, are unable to manage their financial affairs, including more than \$2.6 billion in VA benefits.
- **Burial Benefits:** [http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits\\_book/benefits\\_chap07.asp](http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book/benefits_chap07.asp)
  - During FY 2013, VA provided over \$166 million in one-time burial benefits.
- **Life Insurance:** <http://www.benefits.va.gov/insurance/>
  - 9th largest life insurance enterprise
  - \$1.3 trillion in coverage for 6.7 million clients under 10 separate lines of insurance protection
  - 97 percent satisfaction rating
  - VA extended the period of time when VA asks no health questions in the application process from 120 days to 240 days for Veterans Group Life Insurance.
- **Transition GPS (Goals, Plans, Success):** <http://www.benefits.va.gov/VOW/tap.asp>
  - In FY 2014, VA has provided over 31,000 benefits briefings, career technical training courses, and capstone events to support approximately 364,000 of our Nation's Servicemembers transitioning to work and home after the military. Servicemembers may choose to attend briefings and training more than once; this count does not represent unique Servicemembers.
  - VA has deployed over 300 Benefits Advisors worldwide to support transitioning Servicemembers through Transition GPS activities. Benefits Advisors provide VA Benefits Briefings, Career Technical Training, support Capstone events, and requests for individualized assistance.

## VBA—Reaching More Veterans (cont.)

- **Veterans Employment Center:** <https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/jobs>
  - On April 23, 2014, the Veterans Employment Center launched on eBenefits for:
    - Veterans looking for new career opportunities in the private and public sectors,
    - Servicemembers transitioning to the civilian workforce,
    - Military and Veteran spouses and dependents looking for employment opportunities,
    - GI Bill beneficiaries transitioning from training to the job market, and
    - Public and private sector employers looking to connect with high-quality applicants.
  - This is the first interagency tool bringing a variety of career tools together in one place rather than different agency websites.
  - As of May 2014, the Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics reported Veteran unemployment is at 5.0 percent, which is lower than the national unemployment rate of 6.3 percent.
- **Home loans:** <http://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/>
  - VA-guaranteed loans have maintained the lowest foreclosure rate among all categories of mortgage loans for almost five and a half years.
  - In FY 2013, VA guaranteed 630,000 home loans, the highest volume in the program’s history; those borrowers will save more than \$35 billion over the life of their loans.
  - VA helped nearly 74,000 Veterans avoid foreclosure in FY 2013.
- **Education** <http://www.gibill.va.gov/>
  - Over \$13.2 billion annually to over one million Veterans and eligible family members
  - FY 2013 was the first full year that VA used the Long Term Solution to automate Post-9/11 GI Bill claims processing. For all education claims:
    - Inventory was reduced by 58%, from 214,000 in FY 2012 to 89,000 claims in FY 2013
      - As of May 2014, inventory was reduced to 28,718 claims
    - Students were waiting less time for claims to be processed
      - 32% less time (decreased from 36 in 2012 to 24 days in 2013) for original claims; currently waiting only 16 days for original claims
      - 53% less time (decreased from 21 in 2012 to 10 days in 2013) for supplemental claims; currently waiting only 6 days for supplemental claims

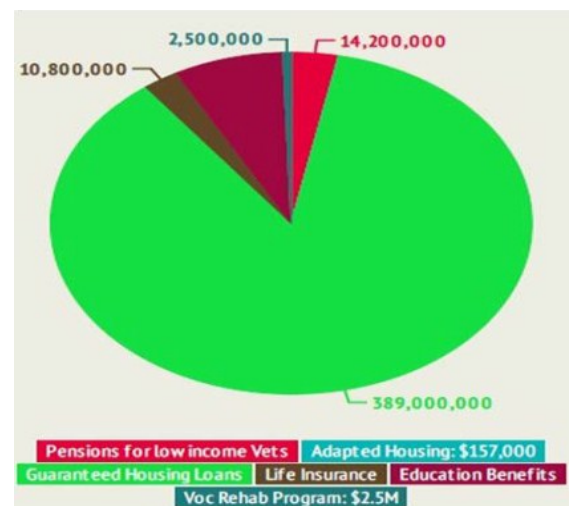
As of May 31, 2014	Inventory	Timeliness: Originals	Timeliness: Supplementals	Payment Accuracy
All Education Claims	28, 718	15.8	6.3	99%
Post-9/11 GI Bill	21,618	15.3	5.6	100%
All Other Ed Claims (Non-Post 9/11 GI Bill)	6,591	17.1	8.1	98%

## VBA—Reaching More Veterans (cont.)

- VA is working with schools, community organizations, and other partners to ensure beneficiaries have all the information they need to best utilize their VA education benefits to graduate and find a good job. More than 73% of students using VA education benefits (over 759,000) are covered under the President's Principles of Excellence, which offer guidelines that promote transparency and student success.
- VA has launched new tools to help beneficiaries learn more about their vocational aptitudes and select an education institution.
  - The second edition of the '[Factors to Consider When Choosing a School](#)' guide offers future students steps to take when researching and choosing a school.
  - [CareerScope®](#) is a free, new tool featured on [benefits.va.gov/gibill](#) that measures a student's aptitude and interests through a self-administered online test, identifying potential career paths.
  - The [GI Bill® Comparison Tool](#) displays median borrowing amounts, graduation rates, and loan default rates by school and indicates whether or not the school participates in the Yellow Ribbon Program or has agreed to adhere to the Principles of Excellence. The tool also allows Veterans, Servicemembers, their spouses, and dependents to estimate the amount of funding they may receive under the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Since the site was launched on February 4, 2014, approximately 150,000 unique visitors have used the Comparison Tool.
  - The [GI Bill® Feedback System](#) is a centralized online reporting system allowing Veterans, Servicemembers, and eligible dependents to report negative experiences with educational institutions. Complaints may be reviewed by State and Federal law enforcement agencies including the Department of Justice. Since the site was launched on January 30, 2014, approximately 1,300 complaints have been submitted.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment** <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/>
  - In FY 2013, the VetSuccess on Campus program expanded from 24 to 94 campuses, increasing access to benefits assistance and vocational rehabilitation counseling.
  - VR&E participant wages increased 480 percent in FY 2013, from an average of \$7,100 at application to \$41,450 at rehabilitation.

## PLAIN AND SIMPLE:

*VA Pays over **\$577 million per day**  
to our Nation's Veterans and their survivors.*



# VETERANS' CLAIMS APPEALS PROCESS

## AN ASSURANCE OF DUE PROCESS

### **Overview of the process of appealing a VA decision on a Claim for Benefits:**

The VA appeals process is unique from other standard appeals processes across federal and judicial systems. It has multiple steps, and a Veteran, survivor, or other appellant can submit new evidence or make new arguments at any time. As a result, an appeal does not simply progress from start to end, but may involve many cycles of additional development and adjudication as it evolves:

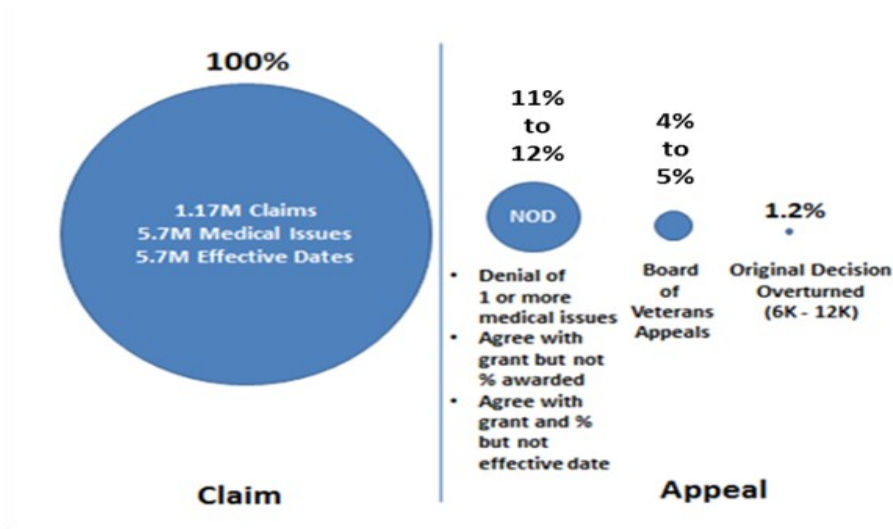
- If a Veteran or other claimant is dissatisfied with any aspect of the decision received from VA on a claim for benefits, he or she may appeal by filing a Notice of Disagreement (NOD) within one year of receiving the decision.
- VA then reviews the decision, including any new evidence or argument that may have been submitted, and either grants the appeal or provides a Statement of the Case (SOC) – a detailed explanation of how VA arrived at its decision.
- From the date of the SOC, the Veteran has 60 days to file a formal appeal on a VA Form 9. The Veteran may also submit additional evidence in support of the appeal.
  - If the Veteran submits new evidence, VA conducts another review of the decision, including the new evidence, and either grants the appeal or issues another explanation of its decision in a Supplemental Statement of the Case (SSOC). After receiving an SSOC, the appellant has 30 days to file a formal appeal or submit additional evidence.
- If the Veteran files a formal appeal, the Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board) reviews the entire claims file and renders a decision without giving deference to any prior decision made. The Board may grant, remand back to the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), or deny any issue on appeal. This means that one appeal may have some issues that are remanded, some that are granted and some that are denied. Remands often arise because the Veteran has introduced new evidence or a new contention in the appeal, or there has been a change in law while the appeal was pending.
- The Veteran may choose to have an optional hearing with VA at various stages in the process. Should the Board deny any issue on appeal, the Veteran may continue the appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, followed by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, and then to the Supreme Court.

### **Who files appeals:**

- Appeals are filed by Veterans or survivors who are dissatisfied with one or more aspects of an initial decision on their claim for VA benefits.
- Approximately 72 percent of appeals are from Veterans who are already receiving VA disability compensation and are seeking either a higher level of compensation or payments from an earlier effective date.
- Approximately 55 percent of Veterans filing an appeal have a disability rating of 50 percent or higher, and are receiving \$822 or more monthly.
- On average, 11 to 12 percent of those who receive decisions from VA on their claims file a Notice of Disagreement (NOD). After receiving an in-depth explanation of the rationale behind the decision through the SOC, only 4-5 percent of those receiving decisions from VA on their claims choose to file a formal appeal to the Board.

### *Appealing a VA Decision on a Claim for Benefits (cont.)*

- Ultimately, only 1.2 percent of claims decisions made in any given year are adjusted as a result of the appeals process.



### **Why people file appeals**

Any Veteran or beneficiary who receives a decision on a claim from VA has the right to appeal that decision. Many times, VA service-connects the claimant's disability and awards benefits, but the claimant believes that VA should have awarded a higher disability rating or an earlier effective date. Claimants may also appeal their decision and argue that they were disadvantaged by an incorrect interpretation of the law or incomplete review of the facts of the case. As described above, they may also appeal the decision and submit additional evidence to support the appeal.

### **How many appeals are pending**

As of May 2014, there are approximately 370,000 appeals pending in the various steps of the VA appeal process, including those initially appealed to VBA, appeals certified to the Board, appeals remanded by the Board, and those pending at the Board.

### **Average length of a pending appeal**

In FY 2013, an appeal in which VA issued only one statement of the case took, on average, 562 days to complete. Thereafter, each additional supplemental statement of the case that was sent as a result of VA receiving new evidence or information added more than 200 days to the total appeal processing time.

### **Why does it take so long?**

VA has a unique, multi-stage appeal process that has evolved in layers since the system was adopted after World War I. This process, allows Veterans, survivors, or their accredited representatives to trigger a fresh review of the entire appealed decision at any time by submitting new evidence or information. This is not an "appeal" in the true meaning of the term, and differs from other Federal agency and judicial appeal processes, in which the record is closed at the time of the initial decision and the agency or court limits its review to evidence included in the record or case at the time of the initial decision, without the underlying facts and evidence evolving constantly. As a result of the introduction of new theories of entitlement and evidence into the VA appeal process, the length of the process is often driven by how many cycles of development and re-adjudication are triggered by submission of new evidence and information.



# VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

AS OF JUNE 2014

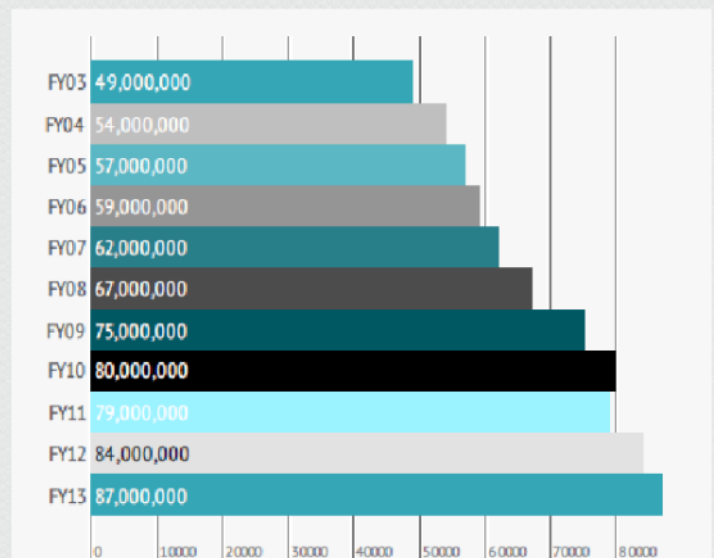
The Veterans Health Administration (VHA), one of three administrations within the Department of Veterans Affairs, is responsible for providing a continuum of comprehensive care that includes primary care, specialized care, and related medical and social support services. VHA is committed to consistently providing the high quality care our Veterans have earned and deserve—the right-care for the right patient at the right time—every time.

## A NATIONWIDE SYSTEM

- Since 2009, VA has enrolled more than 2 million additional Veterans for health care services.
- Outpatient mental health visits have increased from 14 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2009 to over 18 million in FY 2013. VA conducts over 49,000 out-patient mental health appointments per day.
- VA provided 86.4 million outpatient visits last fiscal year. VA has 236,000 health care appointments per day at our facilities across the country.
- VHA performs 400,000 surgical procedures every year or nearly 1,100 surgeries per day.
- Today, every VA health care system has dedicated women's health primary care providers to serve women Veterans.
- In FY 2013, 87,696 Veterans and Servicemembers with Traumatic Brain Injury and polytrauma injuries received VA care. VA is investing approximately \$280M in Traumatic Brain Injury care for Veterans.

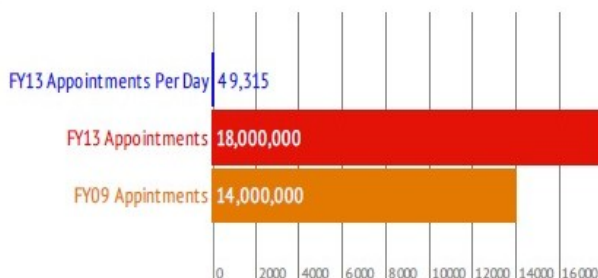
## VA HEALTH CARE AT A GLANCE

OUTPATIENT VISITS FROM FY02-FY13



## ...VA MENTAL HEALTH...

**Outpatient Mental Health Visits**  
49,315 appointments per day



## COMBATING VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) has developed a **National Call Center for Homeless Veterans** hotline to ensure that homeless Veterans or Veterans at-risk for homelessness have free, 24/7 access to trained counselors. The hotline is intended to connect homeless Veterans and their families, VA Medical Centers, federal, state and local partners, community agencies, service providers and others in the community.

Veterans or those who know a Veteran in need can call to **877-4AID-VET (424-3838)** to be connected with VA's services which are in place to help Veterans overcome or prevent homelessness.

# VA TELEHEALTH SERVICES

[www.telehealth.va.gov](http://www.telehealth.va.gov)

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is the nation's leader in [telehealth services](#), which means patients can receive care from members of their health care team without physically being in the same place. Some Veterans live many miles from a VA medical center, making visits to the doctor an all-day event. Others with chronic conditions require constant monitoring but opt to stay at home rather than in a health care facility.

In both cases, VA is utilizing telehealth services to improve access to health care through the use of health informatics, disease management and telehealth technologies. VA patients are finding telehealth to be just what they need to receive personalized care from caring VA medical professionals.

## SHOWING PROGRESS

**Home Telehealth** involves the use of personal medical devices and other technologies that allow VA clinical care coordinators to monitor Veterans remotely and provide care management to help Veterans manage complex health problems from home.

**Real-Time Clinical Video Telehealth** provides Veterans the opportunity to video conference in real-time with specialty and primary care providers from their home or a clinic near their home.

**Store & Forward Telehealth** is used for specialty consultations that do not require real-time or face-to-face interaction with patients. Veterans can meet with their local health care team to provide and store clinical information (e.g. data, image, sound, video) that a VA specialist anywhere in the country can access to evaluate.

### VA Telehealth Programs

-TeleAmputation Care	-TeleOccupational Therapy
-TeleAudiology	-TelePain Management
-TeleCardiology	-TelePathology
-TeleDental Care	-TelePodiatry
-TeleDermatology	-TelePolytrauma Care
-TeleGastroIntestinal/Hepatitis Care	-TelePrimary Care
-TeleGenomic Counseling	-TelePulmonology
-TeleIntensive Care	-TeleRehabilitation
-TeleKinesiology	-TeleSpinal Cord Injury Care
-TeleMental Health	-TeleSurgery (Pre - & Post- Care)
-TeleMOVE! Weight Management	-TeleTransplant (Pre - & Post- Care)
-TeleNeurology	-TeleWomen's Health
-TeleNutrition	
-TeleRetinal Imaging	

### Growth

- Initially used to reach those who live in rural areas, telehealth is quickly expanding its reach into every area and genre of medical care delivery. VA is successfully deploying telehealth on a large scale.
- In FY 2013, more than 600,000 Veterans accessed VA care using telehealth programs, for a total of more than 1.7 million episodes of care. The reach of VA's Telehealth services is anticipated to grow by approximately 22% in FY 2014.

### Value

- VA's telehealth services have resulted in improved access to care for patients, reduced utilization of resources, and high levels of patient satisfaction.
- Telehealth not only continues to provide Veterans access to VA health care closer to their homes, but also eliminates drive time for Veterans. Data analyzed showed that from October 1, 2010 through December 31, 2013, the combined use of two telehealth programs, Clinical Video Telehealth and Store-and-Forward Telehealth at 6 VA Medical Centers alone, have allowed Veterans in this catchment area to avoid driving over 10 million miles to receive medical care.

### Advancements

- VA is moving to a new model of health care delivery, one that not only puts Veterans at the center of their care, but empowers Veterans to be the driver of their care. In addition to telehealth services, VA is providing more options for care and greater access through connected health innovations such as mobile health management apps and secure messaging between patients and providers through VA's online personal health record, My HealtheVet ([www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov)).

# VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH AND WELFARE

Mental Health is how we think, feel and behave. It helps determine how we adapt to a range of demands, relate to others and make choices.

In order to support the rehabilitation and recovery of every Veteran with a mental illness, VA has identified recovery as a guiding principle for its entire mental health service delivery system. Recovery is a journey that involves developing hope, self-direction, empowerment, respect and peer support.

At VA, we have the opportunity, and the responsibility, to anticipate the needs of returning Veterans. As they reintegrate into their communities, we must ensure that all Veterans have access to quality mental health care.

## Improving Mental Health Care

VA works to provide a full continuum of forward-looking outpatient, residential, and inpatient mental health services across the country. We have many entry points for care: through our [151 medical centers](#), 820 community-based outpatient clinics, [300 Vet Centers](#) that provide readjustment counseling, the [Veterans Crisis Line](#), VA staff on college and university campuses, and other outreach efforts.

### FOR INFORMATION VISIT:

VA Mental Health: [www.mentalhealth.va.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov)

National Center for PTSD: [www.ptsd.va.gov](http://www.ptsd.va.gov)

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI):

[www.polytrauma.va.gov/understanding-tbi](http://www.polytrauma.va.gov/understanding-tbi)

Substance Abuse Programs:

[www.oefoif.va.gov/substanceabuseprograms.asp](http://www.oefoif.va.gov/substanceabuseprograms.asp)

Suicide Prevention:

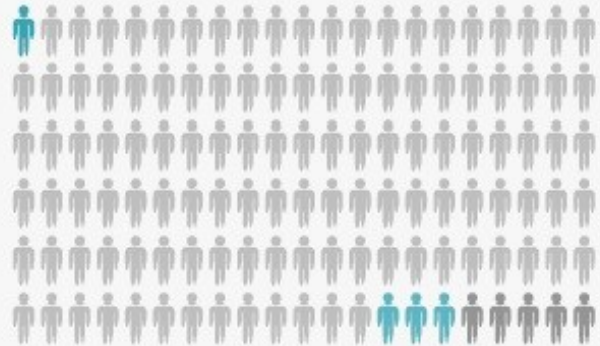
[www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention)

VHA Facebook: [www.facebook.com/VeteransHealth](http://www.facebook.com/VeteransHealth)

VeteransHealth

VHA Twitter: [www.twitter.com/VeteransHealth](http://www.twitter.com/VeteransHealth)

## VETERANS CRISIS LINE



FY13 Rescues: 8,000 # of Calls Per Day: 786  
# of Rescues Per Day: 22 # of Rescues in 5YRS: 32,500

Since its establishment 5 years ago, the Veterans Crisis Line has facilitated the rescue of 32,500 actively suicidal Veterans. That's nearly 22 rescues a day.

1-800-273-8255 & PRESS 1

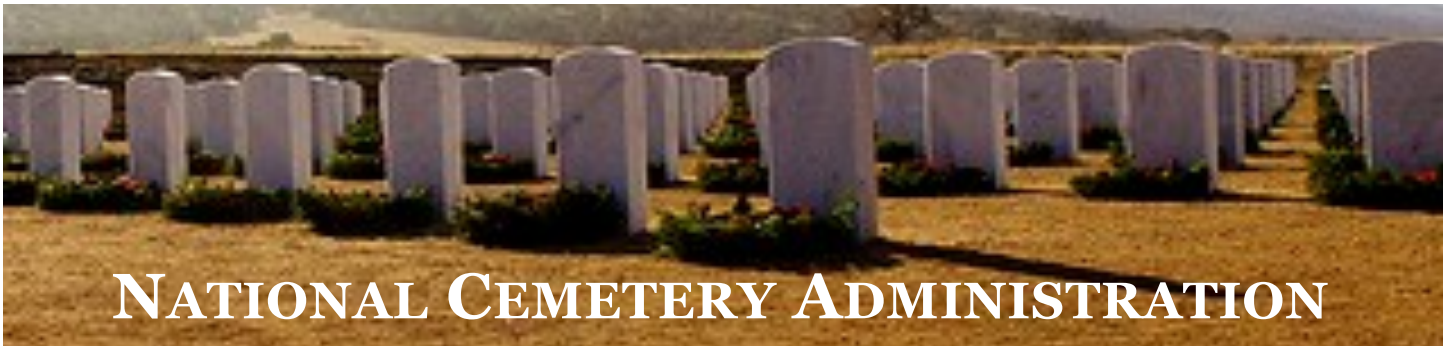
## VA Mental Health Care By The Numbers

- VA has more than **49,000** outpatient mental health appointments per day.
- The number of Veterans receiving specialized mental health treatment from VA has risen each year, from 927,052 in fiscal year (FY) 2006 to more than **1.4 million in FY 2013**.

## PTSD Treatment

- VA is one of the largest integrated mental health systems in the United States (US) that provides specialized treatment for PTSD.
- In FY 2013, **533,720 Veterans** (including 131,651 Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans) received treatment for PTSD in VA medical centers and clinics up from 502,546 Veterans in FY 2011.



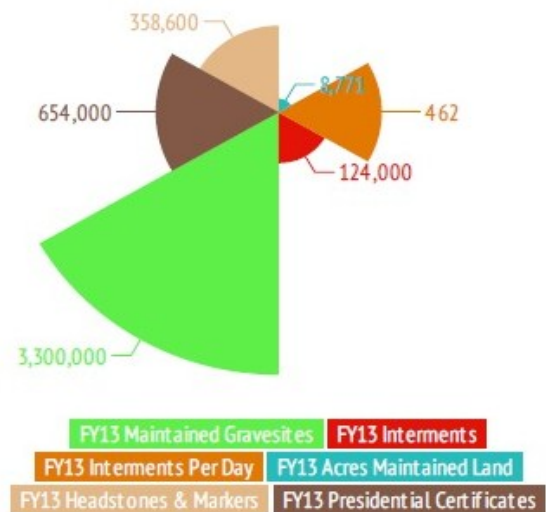


The National Cemetery Administration (NCA), one of three Department of Veterans Affairs administrations, provides memorialization and final resting places for Veterans and eligible family members at national cemeteries across the Nation. NCA employees focus on our organizational mission to provide quality burial and memorial benefits to those who served in uniform to defend our Nation and for their families. NCA continues to expand burial access for Veterans and their families and achieve high levels of customer satisfaction.

## CONSISTENT HIGH QUALITY CUSTOMER CARE

- With a staff of about 1,700 employees, NCA maintains 131 national cemeteries as well as 33 soldier's lots and monument sites. Over 3.9 million Veterans, Servicemembers, and family members are interred in 3.3 million gravesites. Our cemeteries draw over 8.3 million visitors per year.
- NCA performed 124,000 interments and maintained 8,771 acres of developed land during FY 2013. NCA processed 358,600 applications for headstones, markers and medallions, and issued over 654,000 Presidential Memorial Certificates.
- In FY 2013, the NCA Veteran Cemetery Grants Service (VCGS) awarded 18 grants totaling more than \$36 million to 15 states, Guam and one tribal government to establish new Veteran cemeteries and to expand or improve others. Currently, there are 90 operational state and tribal Veteran cemeteries in 45 states, Guam and Saipan, with six more currently under construction.
- NCA's committed, Veteran-centric workforce provides high levels of customer service to Veterans and their families. Not only are we focused on serving Veterans, we continue to maintain our commitment to hiring Veterans. Currently, Veterans comprise over 74 percent of our workforce.

*Honoring Veterans with a Final Resting Place*



To schedule an interment, please contact the  
**National Cemetery Scheduling Office**  
**800 535-1117**  
[www.cem.va.gov](http://www.cem.va.gov)

## IMPROVING VETERANS' ACCESS TO NATIONAL CEMETERY BURIAL OPTIONS:

NCA anticipates that, by FY 2017, 96 percent of Veterans will have access to a burial option in a national, State, or tribal government Veterans Cemetery within 75 miles of their home.

- NCA is establishing five new national cemeteries in the areas of Central East Florida; Tallahassee, Florida; Omaha, Nebraska; Western New York State; and Southern Colorado, which will provide access to 550,000 currently unserved Veterans. NCA has made significant progress in the development of these five new national cemeteries.
- We continue master planning processes for the two planned cemeteries in Florida—Cape Canaveral and Tallahassee National Cemeteries—and Nebraska. On January 21, 2014, VA acquired property for the new national cemetery in Southern Colorado and VA anticipates land acquisition for the new national cemetery in Western New York later this spring.
- To provide enhanced service for 2.4 million Veterans in densely populated areas where existing national cemeteries are far from the urban core, NCA is establishing columbarium-only satellite cemeteries in five urban locations: Chicago, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco.
- NCA is establishing 8 NCA-managed “National Veterans Burial Grounds” to provide access to an additional 133,000 unserved Veterans who reside in rural communities in Maine, Wisconsin, Montana, North Dakota, Wyoming, Idaho, Utah, and Nevada.
  - **First Rural Initiative Veterans' Burial Ground**  
The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) accepted the donation of the Yellowstone Veterans Cemetery in Montana from Yellowstone County as VA's first Rural Initiative Veteran's Burial Ground. VA's National Cemetery Administration began burial operations at Yellowstone National Cemetery on May 26, 2014.

*A Sacred Trust: NCA honors Veterans and their families with final resting places in national shrines and with lasting tributes that commemorate their service and sacrifice to our Nation.*

### -- Five Posthumous Medal of Honor Recipients Interred at VA Cemeteries --

The Medal of Honor was awarded to 24 Army Veterans at a March 18, 2014, ceremony in recognition of their valor during major combat operations in World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Among the 21 medals awarded posthumously, five were awarded to Veterans interred in VA national cemeteries.

Each Veteran honored had already received the Distinguished Service Cross – the nation's second-highest military award – but 19 of them were previously over-looked for the Medal of Honor due to their racial or ethnic backgrounds. The ceremony followed a 12-year Pentagon review, ordered by Congress, of past discrimination in the military.

Sgt. Candelario Garcia received the Medal of Honor for his actions while serving as an acting Team Leader for Company B, 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry, 1st Brigade, 1st Infantry Division during combat operations in Lai Khe, Republic of Vietnam on Dec. 8, 1968. **Garcia is interred at Dallas-Fort Worth National Cemetery.**

Cpl. Joe R. Baldonado received the Medal of Honor for his actions while serving as an acting machine gunner in 3d Squad, 2nd Platoon, Company B, 187th Airborne Infantry Regiment during combat operations in Kangdong, Korea on Nov. 25, 1950. **He is interred at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific.**

Cpl. Victor H. Espinoza received the Medal of Honor for his actions while serving as an acting rifleman in Company A, 23rd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Division during combat operations in Chorwon, Korea on Aug. 1, 1952. **Espinoza is interred at Fort Bliss National Cemetery.**

Master Sgt. Juan E. Negron received the Medal of Honor for his actions while serving as a member of Company L, 65th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division during combat operations in Kalma-Eri, Korea on April 28, 1951. **He is interred at Puerto Rico National Cemetery under the name Juan E. Negron-Martinez.**

Sgt. Alfred B. Nietzel received the Medal of Honor for his actions while serving as a section leader for Company H, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division during combat operations in Heistern, Germany on Nov. 18, 1944. **He is interred at Long Island National Cemetery.**



# VA QUICK REFERENCE WEB LINKS

## A

- Apply for VA Health Benefits: [www.va.gov/healthbenefits/apply/](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/apply/)

## B

- Benefits 101: [www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets.asp)
- Benefits: Returning OEF/OIF/OND Service Members [www.oefoif.va.gov/](http://www.oefoif.va.gov/)
- Blue Button: [www.va.gov/bluebutton/](http://www.va.gov/bluebutton/)
- Burials & Memorials: <http://www.cem.va.gov/>

## C

- Caregivers: <http://www.caregiver.va.gov/>
- Center for Women Veterans: [www.va.gov/womenvet/](http://www.va.gov/womenvet/)
- Compensated Work Therapy: [www.va.gov/health/cwt/](http://www.va.gov/health/cwt/)
- Congressional Relations: <http://www.va.gov/oca/>
- Counseling: [www.vetcenter.va.gov/](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/)

## D

- Dependents: [www.va.gov/opa/persona/dependent\\_survivor.asp](http://www.va.gov/opa/persona/dependent_survivor.asp)
- Depression: [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/depression.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/depression.asp)
- Disability Benefits: [www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/factsheets.asp)

## E

- eBenefits: [www.ebenefits.va.gov/](http://www.ebenefits.va.gov/)
- Eligibility & Enrollment: [www.va.gov/healthbenefits/](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/)
- End of Life Care: [www.va.gov/GERIATRICS](http://www.va.gov/GERIATRICS)

## F

- Forms, VA: [www.va.gov/vaforms/](http://www.va.gov/vaforms/)

## G

- GI Bill: [www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/)
- Gulf War Veterans: [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar/)

## H

- Health Care Benefits: [www.va.gov/healthbenefits/](http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/)
- Home Loans: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/homeloans/>
- Homeless Veterans: [www.va.gov/homeless/](http://www.va.gov/homeless/)

## L

Locations of:

- Facilities by State: [www.va.gov/directory/guide/allstate\\_flash.asp?isflash=&dum=ALL](http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/allstate_flash.asp?isflash=&dum=ALL)
- VHA Facilities: [www.va.gov/directory/guide/division\\_flash.asp?dnum=1](http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/division_flash.asp?dnum=1)
- VBA Facilities: [www.va.gov/directory/guide/division\\_flash.asp?dnum=3](http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/division_flash.asp?dnum=3)
- NCA Facilities: [www.va.gov/directory/guide/division\\_flash.asp?dnum=4](http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/division_flash.asp?dnum=4)
- Vet Centers: [www.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter\\_flash.asp](http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter_flash.asp)
- PTSD Program Locator: [www.va.gov/directory/guide/PTSD\\_flash.asp?isFlash=1](http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/PTSD_flash.asp?isFlash=1)
- Substance Use Disorder Program Locator: [www.va.gov/directory/guide/SUD\\_flash.asp?isFlash=1](http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/SUD_flash.asp?isFlash=1)

## **M**

- Mental Health: [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/)
- Military Sexual Trauma: [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/msthome.asp)
- My HealthVet: [www.myhealth.va.gov/index.html](http://www.myhealth.va.gov/index.html)

## **P**

- Polytrauma/TBI: [www.polytrauma.va.gov/](http://www.polytrauma.va.gov/)
- Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: [www.ptsd.va.gov/public/PTSD-overview/basics/what-is-ptsd.asp](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/PTSD-overview/basics/what-is-ptsd.asp)
- Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service: [www.prosthetics.va.gov/](http://www.prosthetics.va.gov/)

## **R**

- Research & Development: [www.research.va.gov/](http://www.research.va.gov/)
- Rural Health: [www.ruralhealth.va.gov/](http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/)

## **S**

- Social Media Directory: [www.va.gov/health/vamc/](http://www.va.gov/health/vamc/)
- Spouse/Surviving Spouse: [www.va.gov/opa/persona/dependent\\_survivor.asp](http://www.va.gov/opa/persona/dependent_survivor.asp)
- Stand Downs: [www.va.gov/HOMELESS/StandDown.asp](http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/StandDown.asp)
- Suicide Prevention: [www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/](http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/)

## **T**

- Telehealth: [www.telehealth.va.gov/](http://www.telehealth.va.gov/)
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): [www.polytrauma.va.gov/understanding-tbi/](http://www.polytrauma.va.gov/understanding-tbi/)

## **V**

- Vet Center: [www.vetcenter.va.gov/](http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/)
- Vet Success: [www.vetsuccess.va.gov](http://www.vetsuccess.va.gov)
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment: [www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/index.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/index.asp)

## **W**

- Women Veterans: [www.va.gov/womenvet](http://www.va.gov/womenvet)
- Women Veterans Health Care: [www.womenshealth.va.gov/](http://www.womenshealth.va.gov/)

## **ENGAGE WITH VA SOCIAL MEDIA**

### **Facebook:**

<https://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs>

### **Twitter:**

<https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs/>

### **VAntage Point:**

<http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/>

### **Flickr:**

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/VeteransAffairs/>

### **YouTube:**

<https://www.youtube.com/user/DeptVetAffairs>